

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE**

**10 MARCH 2022**

**QUESTION NO. 1**

Jennifer Leach to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

**Reading Festival Waste**

Before I submitted my question to you, the Committee, I had to first ask myself the question, 'Is it worth my time, my energy, my emotional investment to come back down to the Civic Offices for more empty rhetoric, having sat through the Planning Meeting last Wednesday (2 March) when the environmentally destructive Reading Golf Course development was given the green light? My answer to myself was, 'allergic as I am to greenwashing, what other option is there before extinction? What will the children say?'

And so I pose my question.

The destructive legacy of the Festival is a source of great distress to many people in Reading and further afield, and the issue has been raised with Festival Republic on countless occasions. The carnage after each festival remains the same, the local grid was at the time of the last festival still rejected in favour of generators, and the environmental impact still remains deeply painful.

Affluent festivalgoers in the UK are likely to be amongst the last-wave casualties of environmental breakdown. Marginalised and poorer indigenous peoples around the world are already its first victims.

So, what do you feel when you look at these photos?'



## **REPLY by Councillor Davies:**

I invite Councillor Barnett-Ward, the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods & Communities, to make the response on my behalf.

## **REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods & Communities**

Usually, when I think of Reading Festival what I feel is pride and excitement. The festival is a landmark event not just for Reading, but for the whole country, and I love the buzz in the air over festival weekend with so many people visiting our town, having an amazing time and making memories they will always treasure.

Like many people in Reading, I was shocked at the photographs that came out of Little John's Farm last year. That's not the Reading I know, or a version of it that I want presented to the world. These images from Reading Festival and other events around the country are a stark reminder that there is a long way to go to embed the key messages around reduce, reuse, recycle, particularly in a generation that are the most educated, aware and exposed to the impacts of waste on climate change.

Festival Republic are attending tonight's meeting and Committee members will be questioning them on this and other aspects of last year's festival. I'm sure Festival Republic will be able to speak to the measures that they take and continue to build on to reduce waste. Councillors have also asked officers to continue to engage and challenge the Festival to find new ways of reducing its environmental impact. I am aware that the event organisers do take steps to manage the impact on Reading, including the use of bio-fuels for their generators, recycling points in the arena and across the campsites, partnerships with organisations such as GreenPeace and sustainable travel options, but I urge them to do more.

However, I will remind everyone present that we cannot hand-off all responsibility to the festival organisers. Our disposable culture means that Festivalgoers can buy a tent for less than a tenth of the price of their weekend ticket. There is a need for retailers to take a more responsible approach to the sale of 'festival accessories' such as tents. These are sold as essentially disposable items and are of a quality which precludes them from effective re-use and they offer limited opportunity for recycling, even for extraction of energy. Without a wider environmentally focussed approach to events, it is likely that such images will be a continuing feature.

I know from speaking to festivalgoers, particularly young festivalgoers, that they believe - or perhaps convince themselves - that anything they leave behind is automatically 'donated' to charities. They don't realise that whilst some charities do run salvage operations after festivals it is logistically impossible to sort through the vast amounts of items being left behind so only a fraction will ever be reused.

We all have a responsibility to talk to our children, friends, co-workers, anyone we know who will be camping at a festival this summer and make sure they understand the environmental damage they do when treating tents and camping equipment as single use items and abandoning them onsite. We need to make sure they understand that if they want to donate their tent they need to pack it up and hand it in at a charity collection point, not simply walk away and leave it in a field. Every parent of a young person heading to Reading this summer needs to insist that everything they leave home with comes back.

There is a well-known rule of thumb for visiting beaches: 'Leave nothing behind but your footprints; take nothing away but your memories.' I hope the Reading '22 festivalgoers take away all sorts of amazing things from their time in our town this summer, but the

only things we want to see on the fields of Little John's Farm at the end of August Bank Holiday weekend are the footprints left behind by thousands of dancing feet.